



Pharyngitis

# Sore Throat

## **SURPRISING FACTS:**

Only about 15% of the people who go to a doctor with a bad sore throat have strep throat. You need a test to tell for sure. You only need antibiotics if your test shows you have strep throat.

## **WHAT TO DO:**

- Drink more water. Honey and lemon in hot water or herbal teas are good, too.
- Gargle with warm salt water.
- Suck on a hard candy, vitamin C drop or throat lozenge.
- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen to relieve pain. Read the label for a child's dose.

## **CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF:**

- You have a hard time swallowing or breathing.
- You get a sore throat after being exposed to strep throat.
- You also have a fever over 101° or rash with a sore throat.
- You cannot trace the cause to a cold, allergy, smoking, yelling or other irritation.



DOH Pub 130-044 11/2002

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Developed in collaboration with:  
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Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and Healthwise

**Viruses cause most sore throats.** When viruses infect your nose, throat and sinuses, your body fights back by making mucus. This helps wash out viruses. The mucus from your nose and sinuses drains into your throat. It can make your throat feel sore. Allergies, smoking, and air pollution can also lead to a sore throat. Some sore throats happen when stomach acid comes up into the throat. Yelling or speaking for a long time can also make the throat sore.

**Antibiotics don't work against viral infections.** A sore throat from a virus will get better on its own within a week or two. Antibiotics won't make a sore throat go away any faster if it is caused by a virus. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed may harm you by creating stronger germs.

Talk with your health care provider about medicines that can help you feel better. For sore throats caused by allergies, your provider can help you figure out how to avoid the things that trigger your allergies.

**Some sore throats, such as strep throat, are caused by bacteria.** Your health care provider can do a test to see if you have strep throat. Signs of strep throat include throat pain, fever, swollen glands and white patches or pus in the throat. It is contagious and more common in children ages 4 to 11. Strep throat is a serious infection that usually needs to be treated with antibiotics. If your test shows you have strep, your provider may give you antibiotics. Always finish the entire prescription—the last few pills kill the toughest germs.

**The best way to prevent infections is to wash your hands.** Germs are spread when you touch your hands to your mouth, nose and eyes. Washing your hands often with soap and warm water will help keep germs from entering your body. To prevent sore throats don't smoke, and avoid things that cause allergies, such as dust, pollen and fumes. Drink lots of water, and get plenty of rest.



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**Title:**    **Antibiotics 2003 Fact Sheet: Sore Throat/Dolor de garganta**

**Size:**    8.5 x 11

**Paper stock:**    80# text white

**Ink color:**    Black

**DOH Pub #:**    130-044